INDIAN CLASSICS RETOLD

MAHAKAVI BHARAVI

KIRATARJUNA

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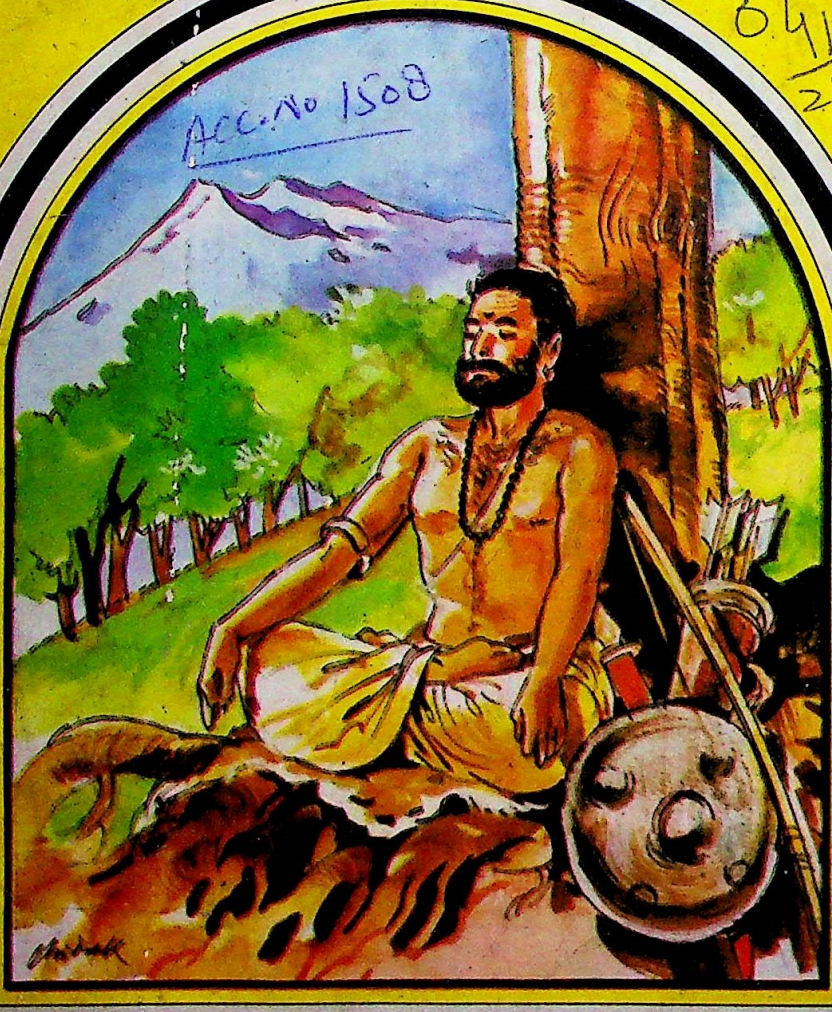

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Mahakavi Bharavi

KIRATARJUNA

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SURESH NATH

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Preface

Indian classics, be they ancient, medieval or modern, are the precious life-line of every true Indian. They are a treasure-house of wisdom, understanding and entertainment. For this reason, every Indian interested in his own culture seeks to go back to them.

The present series is an attempt to fulfil this need. Starting with the epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata and going on to the works of Mahakavi Kalidas and other writers of note, this series strives to present Sanskrit and Hindi classics in simple, readable English. It is hoped that through these pages more and more Indians, young and old, will be able to find their roots.

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1. KIRATARJUNA—A PART OF MAHABHARATA

The story of the encounter between Siva and Arjuna, as told in 'Kiratarjunya' has its setting in the Mahabharata. To enjoy the story of 'Kiratarjunya' fully, it is necessary to understand the Mahabharata. And the first and last chapters of this book shall provide a brief introduction to the Mahabharata, for those who have not read that great epic.

Long, long ago, two brothers were born in the illustrious Kuru family which ruled at Hastinapur in northern India. They were named Dhritarashtra and Pandu. Dhritarashtra was the elder of the two but, as he was blind from birth, Pandu succeeded to the throne after their father's death.

King Pandu had two wives named Kunti and Madri. In the midst of all his luxury Pandu had one great sorrow—he was cursed by a sage and could have no children of his own. But, unknown to him, Kunti already had a son named Karna. The story of Karna's birth goes as follows:

At one time, when Kunti was yet a girl, the great sage Durvasa had stayed for a while at her father's house. Kunti had served him with great devotion. The sage was pleased with her and, knowing of the curse on her future husband, he had taught her a *mantra*. With the help of this *mantra* she could call on any god to give her a son.

Impatient in her girlish eagerness to test the *mantra*, she recited it calling on the Sun god. Immediately the Sun came down in human form and stood before her.

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She was shocked and begged of him to go back. But he was held by the power of the *mantra* and could not return. And so it happened that in due course Kunti gave birth to a son, glorious as the Sun god himself.

To hide her shame, Kunti placed the child in a wooden casket and set it afloat on a river. A childless charioteer saw the casket and, taking it out from the water, was delighted to find within it a beautiful child. He took the child home to his wife. And thus it happened that Karna, the child of the glorious Sun himself, came to be brought up as a poor charioteer's son. Karna grew up to be a great warrior, and became king of the small kingdom of Anga.

After her marriage Kunti, knowing of her husband's great sorrow, told him of her knowledge of the *mantra*. He was delighted to hear this, and requested her to teach it to Madri too. Thus it came to pass that, through the grace of the gods, Kunti had three sons named Yudhishthira, Bhima and Arjuna and Madri had two named Nakula and Sahadeva. Arjuna, the hero of the book Kiratarjunya, was born of Indra the King of the gods. The five sons of Pandu came to be known as the Pandavas.

Dhritarashtra had a hundred sons who were known as the Kauravas. The eldest of these was Duryodhana, an arrogant and greedy boy, followed by Dushasana.

King Pandu died at an early age. The grief-stricken Madri burnt herself on her husband's pyre, after begging of Kunti to stay alive and be a mother to her orphaned children Nakula and Sahadeva.

Pandu was succeeded by Dhritarashtra. The Kaurava and Pandava princes were still young at the time, and were brought up under the care of their grand-uncle Bhishma. Bhishma was a warrior without parallel, who had taken a vow that he would never marry. Out of

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respect for his great qualities of wisdom and strength, he was given the title of '*Pitamah*' or Grandfather.

One day the Kaurava and Pandava princes were playing with a ball when it dropped into a well. All their attempts to take it out of the well failed. Then a Brahman, who had been watching them with a smile, came forward. He took a bow and some arrows from one of the princes, and shot an arrow deep down into the well. The point of the arrow entered the ball. He then shot further arrows in succession, the point of each entering the butt-end of the one before, and in this way formed a chain till the last arrow was within arm's-reach. Then hand over hand the Brahman pulled out the chain and the ball came out at the end.

The excited princes ran to Grandfather Bhishma and told him everything. From the description of the Brahman given by the princes, Bhishma realised that he could be none other than the famed warrior and teacher (*acharya*) Drona himself. Bhishma invited Dronacharya to the palace, received him with great respect and asked him to take over the military training of the Kaurava and Pandava princes. Under his guidance Arjuna came to excel in archery, while Bhima and Duryodhana became experts at fighting with maces.

*

Bhima was the strongest of all the princes, and he constantly teased and bullied his Kaurava cousins. Duryodhana could not tolerate this and he developed a great hatred for Bhima and his brothers. He was always on the lookout for an opportunity to harm them. One day such an opportunity presented itself to Duryodhana. A great festival in honour of Siva was to be held at Varanavata. Duryodhana induced his father to send the Pandavas there for a holiday, along with their mother

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Draupadi to his side, tried to soothe her with gentle words. He then said to Yudhishthira, "Be generous and forgive my son for his foolishness. Take back your kingdom and all you have lost and return to Indraprastha in peace." The Pandavas left the assembly, hardly daring to believe in their unexpected release from calamity.

But fate willed otherwise. After the Pandavas had left, Duryodhana scolded his father for defeating his well-laid plans. A messenger was accordingly sent after the Pandavas inviting Yudhishthira back for another game of dice with Sakuni. This time the condition laid down was that the losing party would leave their kingdom to the winner and go into exile for twelve years and live in disguise during the thirteenth. If recognised during their year of disguise they would go into exile for another twelve.

Yudhishthira played and lost yet again!

Now begins the story of Kiratarjunya.

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2. IN THE FOREST

Once again the Pandavas found themselves deprived of their kingdom and their wealth. Yudhishthira knew that he had been cheated at the game of dice, yet he remained firm in his vows and the Pandavas and Draupadi prepared to leave for the forest. They put on garments made from the bark of trees. Then, taking with them only their weapons and a few simple implements like shovels and pickaxes needed in forest life, they left for the forest. Their family priest Dhaumya alone accompanied them.

Travelling barefoot for many days, they made their way deep into the forest. When they felt that they had placed enough distance between themselves and Duryodhana to escape his unwelcome attentions, they halted and prepared to set up shelters for their stay. With stones and earth and branches they soon erected a few small huts and started living there.

Some years passed in this manner. But even in the peaceful surroundings of the forest their minds were not at rest. They had an uneasy feeling that Duryodhana may be planning some further moves against them, just as he had earlier tried to burn them down in the shellac palace at Varanavata. To find out what plots Duryodhana may be hatching, Yudhishthira called a man from the forest tribes living in that area and sent him to Hastinapur on a secret mission. The man was to live in Hastinapur and find out all he could of Duryodhana's plans.

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Yudhishthira and the Forester

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The man disguised himself as a *brahmchari*. Taking a begging bowl with him, he reached Hastinapur and started living in an *ashrama* there. Every day, bowl in hand, he would go from door to door begging for his food and talking and mixing freely with the people. He kept his eyes and ears open, and in a few days was able to find out all that was happening in the capital. When he felt that there was nothing more to learn, he made his way back to the forest where the Pandavas were living.

On seeing Yudhishthira, the forester bowed low at his feet. After greetings had been exchanged, he said, "My lord, I have been to Hastinapur as you had ordered, and have tried to find out all about the enemy's plans. By your grace I have been successful in this and, with your permission, I shall now tell you everything. A spy is the eyes and ears of a king, and it is my duty to tell you everything truthfully, whether it be pleasing to the ear or not."

Yudhishthira assured the forester that he may speak plainly and without fear, at which the man continued, "*Maharaj*, one may imagine that since Duryodhana has now got what he wanted, he should be content. But nothing could be farther from the truth. The strange thing is that while you are exiled to the forest and he sits on the throne, yet he is worried lest you should take away his kingdom from him. He is conscious of the fact that he has cheated you. He also knows that it is not easy to digest property that has been swallowed through unfair means. So he is now trying to retain his hold over your kingdom through diplomacy. He knows that he can retain your kingdom only if the people are with him. He is trying his best to win their confidence so that, when you return at the end of thirteen years, your own former subjects should turn you out. He pretends to be very noble and, hiding all his vices, he has engaged himself fully in the service of the people.

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You will be surprised to hear, *Maharaj*, that the arrogant Duryodhana has become extremely polite to all, be they high or low. His servants are now like friends, and his friends have become dearer to him than his own brothers could ever be. And as to his relations, he treats them with more respect than if they were lords of the earth itself.

One would hardly believe that the greedy Duryodhana who left no stone unturned to grab your wealth, has now become the very picture of generosity. He gives lavishly to all, but while doing so he pretends that the recipient is doing him a great favour by accepting the gift. In this way he has won over all the great warriors and bowmen who are eager to be of service to him.

He pretends to have great respect for the learned and they sing his praises all the time. And he now dispenses justice with complete fairness and makes no distinction between rich and poor. Even if his own son were brought before him, Duryodhana would not hesitate to punish him as he would any other evil-doer.

And this is not all, *Maharaj*. Through his great cunning he has forged links with other kings too. The roads to Hastinapur remain busy with the comings and goings of these kings, and the palace square is crowded with elephants bearing their gifts to Duryodhana. And as though all this were not enough, the very earth seems to be pouring forth her offerings to him. The farmers in his kingdom are reaping bountiful harvests on account of timely rains and full rivers and canals. But in spite of all this, Duryodhana does not relax his vigilance one bit. He has his trusted spies everywhere, and through them he keeps his fingers on the pulse of the people. He has given the task of guarding the kingdom to his younger brother Dushasana who is giddy with power, while Duryodhana himself is engaged in *yagyas* under the guidance of his priests.

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Duryodhana has achieved what he wanted. The people are entirely with him, and his power and wealth are beyond his wildest dreams. But in spite of all this he is unhappy. Like a snake in presence of the eagle, he too trembles with fear whenever Arjuna's name is mentioned in his presence. In truth, the fruit of enmity with the powerful is always bitter.

Maharaj, you yourself are the essence of truth and justice, and you know where your duty lies. It is not for people like me to advise you. But still you must realise that Duryodhana is bent upon destroying you. It is upto you now to work out a proper plan and take action before it becomes too late."

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younger brothers whom you yourself have pushed into this? Look at your brother Bhimsen. How can you bear to see this prince, who used to ride in royal chariots and was adorned with sandal paste, now roaming among the mountains with his feet caked in dust? And this valiant Arjuna who had conquered the northern regions and laid vast treasures at your feet—is he the same who now has only the bark of trees to cover himself with? I ask you, can you dare to face your brothers Nakula and Sahadeva who roam the mountains like wild elephants and whose skin is raw through sleeping on the hard forest floor? Seeing them like this, how can you still remain indifferent and keep insisting on your peace and *dharma* to which you seem so deeply attached?

People are of various natures, but till now I have completely failed to understand your own nature. When I think of all the trouble that has been heaped upon you, my heart weeps with sorrow. But I am amazed to see that you still remain unmoved by all this.

O king, you yourself who slept in luxury and woke to sweet music every morning, now sleep on the rough forest ground and are woken by the harsh cries of wild beasts. Your body too, which at one time was strong and shapely, has become as feeble as your glory through the diet of forest fruits which is all you get to eat now. It is really pitiful that it is you yourself who have allowed your enemies to reduce you to this. *Maharaj*, I beg of you to stand up now at least and take steps to destroy your enemies. It is for sages to earn merit by mastering their anger, not for kings. However, if you still choose to discard your glory and follow the path of peace and forgiveness, then discard even this bow which is the sign of valour, mat your hair and devote yourself night and day to prayer and sacrifices.

O king, your glory was without parallel. The enemy has been mean and deceitful with you all along, and so

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you are no longer bound by your own promise of exile for thirteen years. Kings who desire victory over a cunning enemy always look for an opportunity for striking back, while maintaining an outward show of peace and friendship.

Maharaj, your glory is sunk into the ocean like the setting sun. But just as the sun, after destroying the darkness of the night, rises in glorious splendour in the morning, you too will rise again and be welcomed back by the Goddess of fortune."

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4. THE VIEWS OF BHIMA

After Draupadi had had her say, there was complete silence in the hut. At length Bhima cleared his throat and addressed Yudhishthira.

"My brother," he began slowly, "there is no one in the world who could have said what our respected Draupadi has just told you. Her wisdom would amaze even Brihaspati, the celebrated teacher of the gods. Like strong medicine her words may upset a weak-hearted man in the beginning, but will surely prove beneficial in the end. So think carefully over what she has said, and do not dismiss her words lightly on the grounds that she is a mere woman. The wise only try to grasp the essence of what they hear without caring whether the speaker is a man or a woman."

Bhima had started slowly but, as Duryodhana's misdeeds came back to his mind, his anger slowly mounted. "You were famous as a knower of right and wrong," he continued with a hint of aggression in his voice. "Then why is it that you are so confused and helpless now, like an elephant caught in quicksand? How can you ignore your enemy's growing strength when you know full well that he is bent upon your complete destruction? This is certainly not expected of a *Kshatriya*.

Courage is the crowning glory of a *Kshatriya* and if that is lost, there can be no hope for him. Even the Goddess of fortune shies away from such a one. So, my brother, shed this lethargy that seems to have become second nature with you, and stand up boldly and face your difficulties like the true *Kshatriya* you were at one time.

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However, if you still imagine that your kingdom will come back to you of its own after the period of exile is over, just think—Can the greedy Duryodhana give up your kingdom so easily after enjoying it for so long? Even if he were to do so, of what use is the strength of your younger brothers which has repeatedly been put to the test in the battlefield? Lead them to battle now. Let them have the satisfaction of destroying the enemy with their own hands. The tiger is satisfied only by the flesh of the elephant killed by its own efforts.

People are not afraid of kicking a heap of burnt-out ashes, but nobody dare kick a blazing fire. Therefore, *Maharaj*, stand up for the sake of your glory. The enemy can enjoy himself only so long as you do not act. Just kindle the fire of your anger once. You will see for yourself that it will not be quenched till the tears of your enemies' widows fall upon it."

By this time Bhima was like an angry elephant, and Yudhishthira spoke gently to calm him down. "My brother," he said, "you speak like a true *Kshatriya*. Your honest nature is shown by your direct and simple words. And what you say is completely in agreement with the science of politics too. How then is it possible for anyone to disagree with your views? I do admit that what you say is no doubt true from one point of view. Still, in times of peril one's duty is not so easily decided. My mind is not yet satisfied, and I need more time to think over the matter carefully.

It is not right to start a new venture without first weighing the consequences carefully. And anyone who wants to progress should first destroy the darkness of his anger. Just see, even the sun cannot rise till it has destroyed the darkness of the night. Anger is the greatest enemy of success, and patience its greatest friend."

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Seeing that Bhima appeared to be a little calmer by this time, Yudhishthira launched directly into the matter under discussion. Including Draupadi too in his address he said:

"Although you have both expressed your views very clearly, there are some points that you seem to have overlooked. It is not quite true to say that if we wait for the thirteen years to be over, Duryodhana would have strengthened his position by that time. He is basically haughty by nature, and cannot hide his arrogance for long. The kings who are now with him will be disgusted with his nature and will leave him. It will then not be difficult to defeat him, just as a tree whose roots have been weakened by a storm can easily be toppled. Also the brave Yadava tribes, Krishna's people, are greatly attached to us and are only biding their time to come over to our side. But if we break our vows now we will be accused of duplicity and will lose their support. So, my dears, we should apply our reason and act neither from anger nor in haste, and you will see that our patience will bring its own reward."

While Yudhishthira was trying to reason in this manner, they saw the great sage Vyas *Muni* coming in their direction followed by a man who looked like a wood-cutter. In the presence of Vyas *Muni* even the carnivorous beasts of the forest became gentle. On seeing him Yudhishthira ran out and, after touching the sage's feet, offered him a raised seat in the shade of a tree. He himself then sat humbly on the ground at the sage's feet.

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Vyas Muni comes to see Yudhishthira

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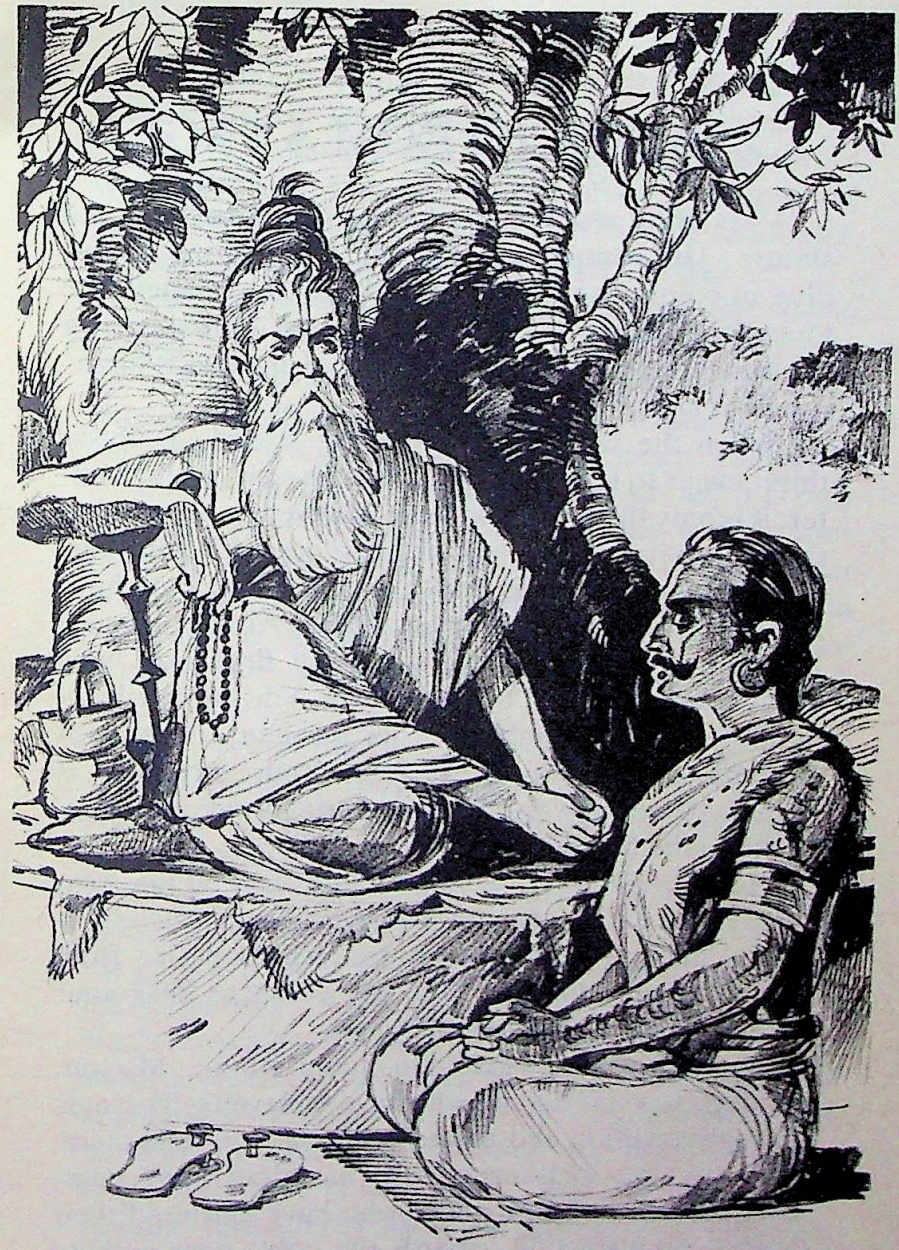

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5. ADVICE FROM A SAGE

Vyas *Muni* was a man of great bodily strength and stature. His complexion was dark, appearing almost blue in colour, and his yellowed hair was matted. He looked impressive as a dark thunder-cloud streaked with lightning, but even so an aura of peace and goodwill surrounded him.

When the sage was comfortably seated, Yudhishthira, eager to learn the reason for his visit, said, "Master, it is only the great who have achieved purity of mind through their good deeds who can hope for your *darshan*. Like rain coming from a cloudless sky, I too have received this unexpected favour today. All the blessings I have ever received from sages and *Brahmans* have today borne fruit, as I have seen you. You are worthy of adoration by all mankind. Your *darshan*, like that of Brahma, must always bear fruit. Your very sight is enough to wash away all sins and bring peace and prosperity to the beholder.

Your coming here is worth more than all the treasures of the earth. I cannot, however, imagine what service a man of God like yourself could desire from worldly people like us. Still, my desire to hear your auspicious words compels me to ask."

Vyas *Muni* spoke gently to Yudhishthira: "My son, although it is said that we who have achieved selflessness through devotion and austerities should view all alike, even so your virtuous nature has drawn my heart towards you. Even for those who have mastered their desires, an attraction towards the noble ones is quite natural.

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Are you not as sons to Dhritarashtra? And do you not far surpass Duryodhana in your good qualities? Even so, in spite of all this being true, Dhritarashtra has abandoned you. He relies on the advice of people like Karna who themselves have no idea of right and wrong, and as such he is sure to come to grief one day.

You people, on the other hand, did not give way to anger even in the face of the great insult to Draupadi in the presence of the entire assembly. You have all along been showing exceptional patience. The Kauravas have only exposed themselves through their mean behaviour.

But Yudhishthira, you should realise that it is only through your valour that you can regain what is your right and due. As things stand, that is not possible, for the enemy is far ahead of you both is strength and in weapons. So you must take steps to increase your own strength, only then can you hope for victory in the war that is to come.

Just look at the enemy's strength. They have with them Grandfather Bhishma, whom death itself dare not face. He has subdued even Parasurama,* the mighty Brahman warrior who wiped out as many as twenty-one *Kshatriya* kings in a terrible blood-bath to avenge the killing of his father. Which of you has the strength to face the great Drona, whose arrows are like shafts of lightning? And when Karna the charioteer's son, who has learnt the science of warfare from the great Parasurama, shows his blazing wrath in battle, there is not a single one among you who can resist him. Having heroes such as these on his side, Duryodhana can be confident of victory. But I have come here, O king, to tell you how Arjuna, through service to the gods, can obtain unlimited strength and divine weapons. With the help of these he will be able to destroy the powerful heroes on the Kauravas' side."

*See glossary

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On the *Maharshi's* instructions Yudhishthira went and called Arjuna. After prostrating himself before the sage, Arjuna sat at his feet, his face bright with joy at being in the great sage's presence.

Vyas *Muni* gazed steadily into Arjuna's eyes. Just as the rays of the morning sun enter the lotus and open up its petals, power seemed to flow from the *Maharshi* into Arjuna, and his face shone with the glory of heroism. The *Maharshi* gave Arjuna a *mantra* to chant.

He then said to Arjuna, "Dear one, the power that I have given you will sustain you in the task that you will soon be undertaking. Take your weapons with you and, without speaking to anyone on the way about the purpose of your visit, go to the Himalayas. When you reach there, put on clothes such as ascetics wear and take to prayer and austerities. But take care that you remain fully armed at all times, and do not let any enemy get the better of you.

This forest dweller Guhmak who belongs to the Kirata tribe will guide you to the Himalayas and take you to the holy place that is sacred to Lord Indra. There you must meditate on Indra. When he is pleased with your devotions he will give you divine weapons that will make you invincible in the three worlds. May God bless you!"

The *Maharshi* then took his leave and returned the way he had come. Guhmak came forward and bowed to Arjuna. Arjuna welcomed him warmly, and the two felt they were already old friends.

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6. A FAREWELL

Early next morning Arjuna prepared for the journey to the Himalayas. He then took affectionate leave of his brothers, and finally went to meet Draupadi. She had been full of hope on account of the sage's visit, but now that Arjuna was actually leaving, fresh doubts troubled her. With her heart full of love and anxiety for Arjuna's safety, and controlling her tears with an effort she addressed him:

"*Aryaputra,*" she said in a voice choked with emotion, "you are going to liberate the Goddess of fortune who has been imprisoned by our crooked enemy. Till your mission is successfully completed, do not think of us and feel sad. The enemy has committed a terrible crime against us. When I think of how I was dragged to the assembly and shamelessly insulted in the presence of everyone, my hair stands on end. I have somehow kept control over myself all this time, but after you are gone the wounds in my heart will open afresh.

O Arjuna, I sometimes wonder if you are the very Arjuna who had defeated many noted kings and filled the treasuries of Indraprastha with their tributes. Your glory is gone along with your looks too. You resemble an elephant whose tusks are broken. Even your once bright weapons have become dull and blunted, having remained idle for so long. Look at these tresses of mine that have been so cruelly violated by the wicked Dushasana. They are crying for revenge. Remember what happened in the assembly at Hastinapur? It is a blot on your manliness and strength. He alone is worthy

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of being called a *Kshatriya* who can protect the helpless ones and save them from injustices.

Both your glory and our fortunes are covered by the dust of defeat. But, O *Aryaputra*, it is you alone who can rescue us from this sad plight. On account of your unique heroism this burden has fallen on your broad shoulders. I sometimes get frantic with worry when I imagine the dangers you must face during your mission to the Himalayas, but on account of your great courage, Lord Indra will help you overcome these. Do not relax your vigilance even after reaching the holy place, for your enemies will be looking for an opportunity of killing you. Follow the advice of the *Maharshi* in all matters. I eagerly await the moment when you will return home successful and I shall clasp you in my arms in welcome."

Just as the light of the sun increases seven-fold on its contact with the east, Arjuna's face shone with heroism at these brave words of Draupadi. After he had taken leave of her he went to the priest Dhaumya and touched his feet in reverence. The priest blessed his weapons with the chanting of *mantras,* and then blessed Arjuna so that he may succeed in his undertaking.

Arjuna then put on his protective armour, buckled on his sword and took up his victorious Gandiva bow in hand. Behind his shoulders were slung two quivers that no enemy had ever seen, as Arjuna had never turned his back in the battlefield. These quivers always remained filled with sharp-pointed arrows. Then, after his last farewells, he set out with the forester on his way to the Himalayas. When they started, the gods in their joy beat their drums and showered petals from heaven, so that the sky looked as though dressed for a wedding.

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7. THE JOURNEY

The two walked steadily for many days, travelling during the daytime and resting under the trees at night. They ate forest fruits and berries, which were plentiful during this time of the year.

The rainy season was over and autumn had set in. The air was clear and cool and the freshly-washed earth appeared like a new bride bedecked with a garland of swans. Enchanted by the beautiful surroundings and talking together, they made light of the journey to the mountains.

Their way took them past several villages where the huts were covered with flowering creepers. The villages were surrounded by fruit orchards and lush paddy fields where the ripening ears of grain swayed in the gentle breeze. Young girls were guarding these against birds and wild animals. They wore flowers in their hair, and the yellow pollen from these speckled their hair like grains of gold. At other places they came across ponds completely hidden by the water plants and by the flowers blooming on the surface. The lotus flowers looked like roses flowering on the bare ground. Only when the fish with the thousand teeth broke the surface could the water be seen.

At one place they passed through a meadow bordering a stream where two huge bulls were engaged in a fight, and both of them stopped to watch. At length one of the bulls routed the other and, returning to the river bank, started pounding the earth and bellowing loudly to announce his victory to the cows. But the cows continued to graze, completely unconcerned. And the vil-

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lage girls who had come with the cows continued their merry chatter and sweet songs, on hearing which even the deer in the forest forgot to crop the tender leaves and peacocks stopped pecking for food.

They saw milkmaids outside their huts churning butter, their bright earrings glinting merrily in the rays of the morning sun. Between their half-open lips their teeth appeared beautiful as saffron buds. When they swung their arms, the graceful swaying of their bodies was truly charming.

In this way, enchanted by the beauty of the countryside they passed through, they arrived in due course at the foot of the Himalayas. Arjuna lifted up his eyes to the majestic peaks above. It seemed to him that Lord Siva himself had created these mountains as a symbol of his glory.

Arjuna saw dense dark forests rising half-way to the snowline, and intense white snow above that. The gigantic peaks were hidden in dark clouds where streaks of lightning played continuously. It is said that at one time, long back when the earth was young, mountains had wings. They flew all over the earth at great speed and left death and destruction wherever they rested on the ground, till one day Indra in his rage chopped off their wings. Even though mountains had no wings now, the clouds that hovered over them gave them the appearance of being winged.

Now that the destination was so near, Arjuna, urged on by a desire for victory, started climbing at great speed as though he would cross the sky itself. Up and up went the two, through forests full of Kadamba flowers and swift-flowing mountain streams. They came across herds of wild elephants roaming in the forests, and here and there they saw ponds covered with lotus. The grandeur of the mountains quite took Arjuna's breath away.

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Seeing Arjuna so enraptured by the beauty around him, the Kirata spoke: "*Panduputra*, these towering peaks of the Himalayas seem to pierce the sky itself. In these beautiful surroundings, among these flowering vines and lovely lotus ponds, even *rishis* find it difficult to control their desires, not to speak of ordinary men.

Nowhere in the three worlds is there a place that can compare with this. It is here that Parvati underwent her austerities for attaining Lord Siva for a husband. And it is on Mount Kailasa, among these very mountains, that Lord Siva is constantly engaged in meditation, out of sight of ordinary mortals. There are plants here that draw so much energy from the ground that their glow lights up the darkness of the night. The vegetation here remains ever-fresh and the leaves of the wonderful flowering trees never wither. And look! Over there is Mount Indraneel for which we are bound."

In this way, with Guhmak relating incidents connected with some of the famous peaks around, their journey was soon completed. Guhmak then prepared to take his leave, and told Arjuna in parting, "Remember that even though you come in peace, your enemies will try to harm you. So, as the *Muni* has cautioned you, remain watchful all the time and do not let your guard slip even for a moment. May Lord Siva grant you the strength to conquer your difficulties and crown your efforts with success!"

After this final caution Guhmak took his leave and went back. After he was gone Arjuna kept thinking of him for a long time, for parting from the good ones is always sad.

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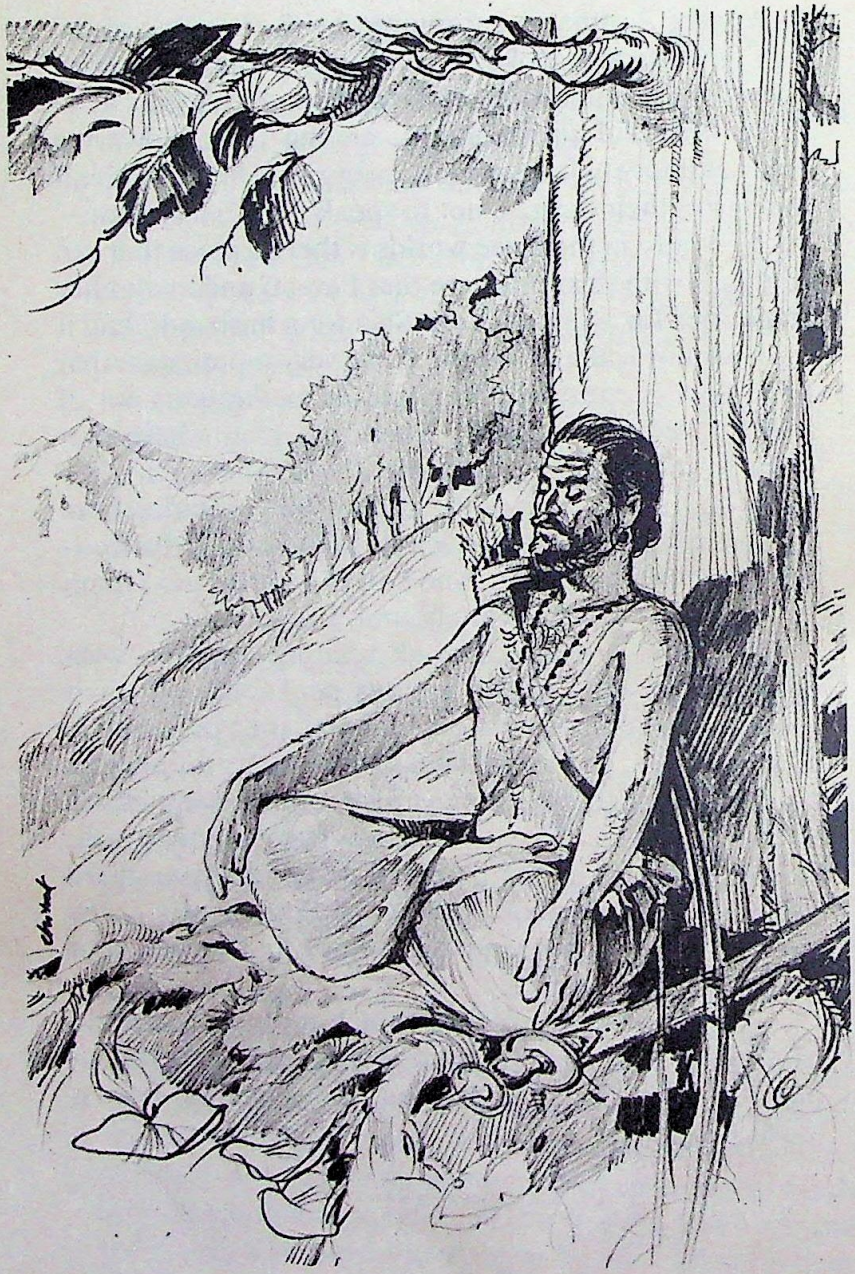

Arjuna in Meditation

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8. ARJUNA IN MEDITATION

After Guhmak had left, Arjuna continued to climb in the direction that had been pointed out to him. He reached Mount Indraneel through which the river Ganga flowed. The surface of the swift-flowing river was broken into a thousand ripples that shone brilliantly in the sun, and the spray from its thundering waterfalls continuously washed down the trees and plants growing nearby. As he walked along, a gentle breeze carried flowers from the trees onto his path and brought the sweet fragrance of the lotus to his nostrils. Thus it appeared to Arjuna that Nature itself was pleased at his mission. Encouraged by these auspicious signs, Arjuna continued to walk steadily till he arrived at the holy meditation place itself, in the midst of a beautiful forest and surrounded by majestic snow-clad peaks.

Arjuna removed the clothes he was wearing and, after a bath in the Ganges, he put on garments made from the bark of trees. Over these he put on his protective armour and armed himself with his weapons once again. He then spread a deerskin on the ground at the base of a tall *deodar* tree and seated himself cross-legged upon it. He now had just one desire in his heart—through his devotions to obtain the grace of Lord Indra. All worldly thoughts left his mind and, controlling his senses, he went into deep meditation.

Although Arjuna continued to wear his weapons, peace ruled supreme in his heart. In his presence even Nature seemed to tread softly to avoid any disturbance.

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The breeze was cool and fresh, and the fierce rays of the sun filtering through the leaves overhead were strangely comforting. At night the forest trees spread their flowers on the ground for Arjuna to sleep on. But, in spite of all this, Arjuna did not give way to pride, for his sights were fixed steadily on another goal.

For long Arjuna applied himself to his single-minded devotions. At length the astonished forest-dwellers went in a body to Amravati in heaven to convey news of his austerities to Lord Indra. These people were Indra's trusted messengers and could enter his presence without any hindrance. After bowing before Indra they said:

"O Lord, someone has come to your place on Mount Indraneel on the earth below. With a desire for victory in his heart, he has taken to severe penances. So fierce is the blaze of his glory that it is not possible to stand before him. His manly form is covered in the bark of trees, but still it seems that the sun itself is peeping out from beneath his garments. His arms are strong as fierce serpents, and he keeps a great bow that can destroy any enemy. He is fully armed but even so he appears peaceful as a *rishi*.

Seeing his great qualities, even Nature seems to have become his humble devotee. The breeze moves gently, the earth remains green and the sky clear, and whenever there is dust in the air the rain washes it down. In the presence of such a one, even the tiger loses its lust to kill. When he needs flowers for his prayers, the trees themselves bow down to offer him these. Till recently Indraneel was under your rule, but now it seems to have passed into the hands of this stranger.

To give you some idea of his strength—he is of great stature, and never tires in spite of his constant labours. Although he appears peaceful by nature, one is overcome by fear at his very sight.

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From his appearance he is someone very great. But in spite of all our efforts we have not been able to find out who he is—whether god or demon, the son of some great *rishi* or the crown prince of a royal family. This much, however, is certain—he could be no ordinary human. And as to the purpose of his severe penances, here too we have failed to get a single clue. We are ignorant forest folk, and have come to place the entire matter before you."

When Indra heard of his beloved son, his heart overflowed with joy. But he controlled his features with an effort and pretended as though he knew nothing of the matter. He assured the forest folk that they had nothing to fear and may safely return to the earth. But Indra wished to put Arjuna's determination to the test, and calling some *apsaras* he said to them:

"O nymphs of heaven, I have called you here for an important task. A *Kshatriya* has come to Mount Indraneel in the Himalayas down on the earth below, and he has engaged himself in severe austerities there. It is necessary that his resolve be broken, otherwise he will become more powerful than the gods themselves. So I want you to go down there with your *Gandharva* escorts and use all your powers to destroy his will.

Only you can do this difficult work, as you are accomplished in the arts of love. A man may well resist ordinary weapons, but your weapons of love can never fail. When Lord Brahma made you, he took beauty from all over the universe to form you—He stole it from the moonbeams and from the flowers of the lotus. The man does not exist who can resist your charms. Even *rishis* find it impossible to resist you, not to speak of ordinary men.

And then this man is no *rishi* but is bent upon enjoying the pleasures of the earth. He wants to destroy his

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enemies and obtain material wealth. This much is evident from the fact that although he is engaged in penances, he wears dreadful weapons. He has certainly not come for the liberation of his soul, for no man wishing to follow that path would wear weapons. So, as you can see, it will not be difficult for you to conquer such a one.

Maybe you girls are afraid of being cursed by him. But you need not have any fears on this account, for although he has the power to curse like any great *rishi*, the brave ones are always protective towards women and never try to harm them. Therefore go without fear and carry out this work of the gods."

When the *apsaras* heard Indra's praises, their faces glowed with pleasure and they looked even more beautiful so that even Indra, the thousand-eyed King of the gods, found it difficult to take his eyes off them.

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9. AN ERRAND FOR THE APSARAS

The fears of the *apsaras* were set at rest after Indra had promised them that they would be perfectly safe. They bowed in acceptance of his command and left his presence, then went and busied themselves in preparation for their task. They decorated their hair with flowers, applied cosmetics and put on gaily coloured clothes as though they were bound for a festival.

The gods had placed their own chariots and elephants at the disposal of the *apsaras*. These elephants were decorated with vermilion and other bright coloured minerals, and the rich coverings on their backs were tied down with broad waist-bands of gold. Lit up by the rays of the setting sun, they looked like fiery clouds in the sky. Talking excitedly together, the *apsaras* mounted the elephants and chariots, in readiness for the departure to earth. Skilled *Gandharva* musicians, taking their instruments, joined the party. It was a gay throng indeed that gathered on the plains of heaven and they were given a warm send-off by the gods assembled there to wish them a safe and successful journey.

The way from heaven to the earth far below was picturesque indeed. They passed through the inky-black sky, with the stars around them shining brilliantly like diamonds. After some time the darkness melted away and they saw the fiery disc of the sun rise in the east below. Proceeding further, they were soon directly above the sun and were almost scorched by the fierce heat. Urging the chariots and elephants to greater

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speed, they descended rapidly and breathed a grateful sigh of relief when the sun was left far behind.

Nearer the earth lay masses of snowy clouds. When the procession passed through them, the clouds were shattered. And all their moisture fell on the travellers in a refreshing shower of rain, removing the heat and fatigue of the journey. Then, taking the path of the birds, they flew in the sky, slid down a rainbow and alighted on Mount Indraneel near the river Ganges. While passing through the sky the elephants had taken pieces of white cloud with them. These were still sticking to their sides so that the elephants looked like the winged mountains of old.

By now everyone was tired out from the long journey. After the elephants and horses had been set free to graze, they all had a meal of forest fruit and then lay down under the trees for the night.

They were up early next morning and had a bath in the river Ganges.

The *apsaras* then dressed up again and, after reapplying their cosmetics, set out for Arjuna's hermitage along with their *Gandharva* friends. By now Indra's assurance was but a distant memory, and the *apsaras* were feeling a little scared at the venture they had so lightly undertaken.

Nearing the hermitage, the maidens saw Arjuna seated on a slab of rock beside the river Ganges, deep in meditation. Although he had grown thin on account of his austerities, there was a glow on his face and he looked majestic as Lord Indra himself. Looking at him, the *apsaras* felt that there was nothing in the three worlds that was beyond the power of such a one, and all his austerities were quite unnecessary. "Till now we have been sent out to conquer ordinary *rishis* and demons," they said to one another. "But if we can defeat such a man, Lord Indra will indeed be pleased with us."

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Arjuna was fully armed but even so he appeared peaceful, and on seeing him, the fears of the maidens were completely removed. They had come to ensnare him, but instead they lost their own hearts to him and stood gazing helplessly at him.

Then the *Gandharvas* gently reminded the maidens of their duty, shaking them out of their dreams. The maidens began to sing in a sweet voice, accompanied by the *Gandharva* musicians on the *Veena* and *Mridang*. They started slowly, but gradually the beat became faster and the music increased in volume till the very air throbbed with sound. But Arjuna remained quite unmoved by all this.

The *apsaras* now tried other tactics. They called upon the God of the Seasons to come to their aid. The different seasons came, one following upon the other in rapid succession, and each doing its utmost to charm Arjuna away from his meditation.

First came the rainy season. The malati creepers became laden with sweet-scented flowers, and a light, refreshing shower of rain came down and settled the dust. The nightingale began to sing, and peacocks danced in their joy.

The charms of the rainy season completely failed to sway Arjuna from his steadfast devotions. The rainy season slunk away in defeat and was quickly followed by autumn. The sky became a clear blue, and the air vibrated to the humming sounds of honey-bees flitting from flower to flower. The entire forest seemed to give expression to its joy by bursting into bird-song. But the charms of autumn, as of the winter season that followed, failed to make any impression on Arjuna.

The maidens now called Spring to their aid. This is the season that is very dear to the God of love, and the

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apsaras had every hope of conquering the ascetic now. With the touch of spring the entire forest burst into bloom. The maidens started to sing and dance, the jingling of their anklets being enough to set all hearts a-flutter. On and on they went, the frenzy of the dance keeping pace with their increasing desperation, till they dropped exhausted to the ground. But through all this, Arjuna remained quite undisturbed. Seeing that even the all-conquering Spring had failed, Summer was too nervous to put in an appearance at all.

The *apsaras* had come to captivate Arjuna, but were themselves smitten by the tender arrows of the God of Love. Too shy to speak of their love, they sent their companions to whisper their messages into his ear. Said one beauty: "O ascetic, my friend is standing before you calling out for you. She has lost her heart to you. Just open your eyes and look at her. Her eyelashes are wet with tears of love for you, and her only desire is to be with you for ever." Another said, "O cruel one, do you not see my companion who is dying for love of you? How can you be so heartless and ignore her in this state? If you do not grant her your love she will surely die. Ascetics are said to be kind-hearted, so give up your indifference and take her into your arms." But in spite of so much temptation, Arjuna remained steadfast as the Himalayas.

Completely frustrated in all their attempts to win his love, the *apsaras* now tried to rouse his anger and hurled taunts at him. "O ascetic," raved one beauty, "you pretend to be peaceful, but you wear warlike weapons. Who do you think you are trying to deceive? And don't pretend to be so pious either. I know very well that you have some other girl tucked away somewhere, that is why you refuse even to look at us. But I am sure she is as ugly as you are!" Another maiden, her lips trembling with rage, took off her flower girdle and beat Arjuna with it on the chest.

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At last, completely frustrated by the failure of all their attempts to shake Arjuna's resolve, the *apsaras* accepted defeat. With tearful eyes they made their way back to Amravati in heaven. On reaching there they told Indra all that had happened, and admitted failure.

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10. A VISITOR

Indra was thrilled when he heard of Arjuna's dedication and self-control. Wishing to meet his beloved son and test him further, he disguised himself as an aged *sanyasi* and came down to Arjuna's hermitage in the Himalayas. Seeing the venerable *sanyasi*, who seemed tired as after a long journey, Arjuna hastened to receive him and make him comfortable.

The sage's appearance was quite remarkable. The snow-white hair surrounding his face shone like the rays of the moon. Beneath white eyebrows his eyes were like deep lotus ponds. He was bowed down with age and depended upon his stick for support. But even though his body was wasted with age, his soul shone through like the sun from behind a cloud. Arjuna had no idea that the visitor was his own father Indra.

After he had rested awhile and partaken of some fruit he said to Arjuna, "Son, it is a matter of great happiness that you have taken the path of renunciation even at this young age. The joys of youth are fickle as the clouds in autumn. Worldly pleasures are only temporary, and they always lead to pain.

My son, it is a measure of your greatness that you have a desire for immortality. But a doubt has arisen in my mind—your appearance belies your intentions. Ascetics do not wear anything apart from deerskin and garments made of bark, but you are dressed in armour like one going into battle. Having shed your desires and taken the path of renunciation, why do you still carry this warlike bow and wear these quivers on your shoulders?

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And why this dreadful sword which is like the right hand of the God of Death himself? All this is certainly not in keeping with your peaceful intentions. Your appearance makes me think that you desire not immortality but the end of your enemies. O ascetic, I would advise you not to throw away the fruits of your austerities so lightly. Give up all thoughts of fighting your enemies. Develop peace and calm and attain liberation from the terrible cycle of birth and death.

However, if you still wish to conquer your enemies, you must first conquer your own senses. One who has mastered his sense has mastered the entire world. But one who is a slave to his senses is like a bullock yoked to a cart—always a servant to others. Dear one, in this place the doors of salvation are open to you, but first you must give up these weapons."

After the *sanyasi* had spoken, Arjuna said to him with great humility:

"Lord, who but yourself, the embodiment of all virtues, can give me such illuminating advice? But I am sorry to see that you are not aware of the purpose of my austerities. And that is why, O exalted one, you are giving me advice that is more suited to hermits. It is not possible for me to achieve peace of mind till I have quenched the fire in my heart with the blood of mine enemies.

I am a *Kshatriya*, Pandu's son Arjuna by name. As advised by Vyas *Muni* I have taken a vow that I shall please the adored Lord Indra through my austerities. And I am here on the orders of my eldest brother Yudhishthira, to practise such austerities.

It is the play of destiny that *Maharaj* Yudhishthira has gambled away his kingdom, himself and his brothers, even his wife Draupadi. After our enemies had won, they tried to remove Draupadi's clothes. Not only

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that, they kept on taunting us all the time. The way they insulted Draupadi in public will become the root cause of their own destruction.

Everyone in the assembly witnessed this great outrage without so much as a word of protest. Draupadi looked helplessly at her husbands, eyes filled with tears. It is only our eldest brother, who has firm faith in *dharma*, who could tolerate all this. He firmly believes that it is more important to follow the path of virtue than to punish an enemy.

We considered Dhritarashtra's sons as our own kith and kin, that is why all this could happen. If we had known them better, we should never have come to this. We have become destitutes on account of the enemy. We can't even look one another in the eye for shame. It is only the hope of regaining our lost self-respect that has sustained us so far.

Lord, I do not want comfort. I have not come here to gain release from this fleeting life. I have just one desire– that the mud that the enemy has flung upon us should be washed away by the tears of their widows.

Perhaps you regret having advised such a one as myself. But I am firmly resolved that, till such time that I have destroyed the enemy and restored the honour of my family, even if salvation were to be offered to me, I shall reject it as an obstacle to my task. Lord, I am determined that, seated in this very place, I shall either please the thousand-eyed Indra and obtain from him divine weapons with which to destroy my enemies, or give up my life in the attempt."

Hearing these words of the brave Arjuna, Indra was overwhelmed with joy. He showed himself in his true form and, taking Arjuna into his arms, said, "Dear son, if you want complete success then worship Siva, the destroyer of all sin. When he is pleased with you I myself

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shall give you weapons which will make you invincible in the three worlds. You will destroy your enemies and regain your kingdom." With this parting blessing Indra disappeared.

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11. WORSHIP OF THE GREAT SIVA

As advised by Indra, Arjuna started on severe austerities as part of his worship of the great Siva. For several days he fasted, standing on one leg facing the sun. Through self-discipline he had developed a tremendous will, firm as the Himalayas.

Arjuna was determined to win the grace of Lord Siva at any cost, and went through his austerities with acute concentration of purpose. For him the luscious fruit growing around him and the springs of clear, cold water seemed not to exist. The power developed in him through his austerities was such that although the body became thin, he seemed to have the strength to subdue the three worlds.*

The ascetics living in the forest saw all this with wonder and amazement. Who could he be? Was he Lord Indra himself, or the Sun god or the God of Fire? And why had he come to that place? They were amazed that the fierce blaze with which he seemed to be surrounded had not set the trees on fire or evaporated the ponds. With a great fear in their hearts they went to Lord Siva on Mount Kailasa to pray for his help. Siva was at the time deep in meditation.

A brilliant light came from Siva, and the ascetics found it impossible to look in his direction. The Lord subdued his lustre so that the *rishis* could see him. They then prostrated themselves at Siva's feet and placed their problem before him:

"O Lord, some being has taken human form and is

*See glossary

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carrying out austerities among the Himalayas. He has surpassed even the sun in brilliance. His hair is matted and he wears bark garments like an ascetic, but with all this he carries a great bow and wears a sword. When he walks the earth trembles under his feet and the gods stand and stare. When he suspends the flow of his breath through *Yoga*, even the wind stops blowing and all nature becomes still with him. It seems to us that he wants to subdue the gods and the demons and conquer the entire world. The amazing thing is that with all this, his expression is peaceful.

But whatever his purpose—whether he wants to destroy the three worlds or attain immortality, we cannot stand the power of his glory. We seek your protection O Lord. Do not delay or we may come to grief."

Lord Siva replied in a voice deep as the rumbling of the ocean: "You need have no fear. This man is Arjuna. He is none other than Vishnu himself who has taken form as Arjuna and Krishna to destroy the evil that has raised its head in the world. He is really engaged in the work of the gods. This ascetic has come here for obtaining divine weapons with which to defeat the enemies of mankind, and for that he is undergoing severe penances to please me.

Knowing that Arjuna is engaged in the work of the gods, a demon called Mook is, at this very moment, making his way towards Arjuna to kill him. The demon knows that Arjuna is vigilant and remains fully armed and that he cannot be conquered in direct battle. So the demon has taken the form of a wild boar and is planning to attack Arjuna in this guise.

Come with me to Arjuna's hermitage. I shall go there disguised as a Kirata hunter and I shall attack the boar. Arjuna too will attack him and, by the code of hunters, there will be a dispute between us and we shall fight. Even though his body has been weakened through fasting and austerities, you will witness his unique valour."

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12. A KIRATA CHIEFTAIN

Lord Siva disguised himself as a Kirata chieftain. As was the practice among Kirata forest folk, he tied back his hair with a flowering vine and decorated it with peacock feathers. Around his neck he wore a garland of beads, and in his hand he carried a large bow and a single arrow. He was surrounded by his followers and attendants who too were dressed in similar colourful fashion, and who carried an assortment of spears and other weapons.

They went towards Arjuna's hermitage. Nearing it, on the orders of their master, they dispersed and went into the forest in small groups. There they set up a loud clamour, beating drums and blowing their trumpets and yelling at the top of their voices, as though they were out on a deer-hunt. In this fashion they advanced slowly towards the hermitage. Hearing these menacing sounds, the forest creatures ran in fear, trying to escape from their path. When the cows stampeded in terror, their bushy tails were caught in dense clumps of bamboo, holding them fast. But the cows did not struggle, for fear of attracting the attention of the Kirata hunters. Instead they stood perfectly still till the hunters had passed by. All in all, the forest presented a scene of utter confusion.

The boar-demon had been hiding in the forest waiting for some such opportunity. Hoping to escape notice amid all this uproar, he came out of the forest and charged straight at Arjuna. The boar was black in colour and the bristles on his neck stood stiff and erect in his rage. In his mad rush the trees in his path were uprooted and the rocks shattered with the impact of his shoulders.

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Siva concealed his army in the forest and, taking with him just a few followers and hiding behind trees and creepers, he went for the demon.

Arjuna saw the boar rushing at him. He was surprised that the huge animal, which seemed to have the power to rip up the mountains with his tusks, had chosen him for its prey in preference to all the forest creatures. Why should that be so, he wondered? Near the hermitage even fierce tigers and snakes had given up their lust to kill. Surely this could be no ordinary animal. But animal or demon, he was an enemy and so it was Arjuna's duty to kill him. *Rishi* Vyas too had advised him to that effect.

Arjuna took up his Gandiva bow and, setting an arrow to the string, prepared to receive his enemy. Just at that moment Siva too set his arrow to his Pinaka bow and stretched the string to the ear.

Siva's arrow was the first to be discharged. The sky was lit up with its flash and elephants cowered in fear when they heard the thunder of the bow-string. The arrow went with such speed that it seemed as though it entered the boar's body at the same instant that it left the bow. It pierced the demon's body as effortlessly as though it were piercing the mist.

Just at that moment Arjuna's arrow too left his Gandiva and went whistling towards its prey. It went so fast that by the time the sight travelled from the bow to the demon, it had pierced the body right through. The demon glared at Arjuna with hate-filled eyes, and shattered the rocks underfoot in one last futile effort to reach him before it died.

Arjuna had several arrows in his quiver, but he had a special attachment for the one that had killed his enemy and he wished to get it back. With this intention he went up to the boar and, bending down, pulled out

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The Fight between Arjuna and the Kirata Chief

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the arrow from the hillside beyond. When he straightened up again he found an armed Kirata forester standing before him. The forester had been sent by Siva. After bowing to Arjuna, the forester said politely:

"*Maharaj*, it seems from your appearance that you were born into a royal family. The glory on your face seems to indicate that even Indra is ruling over the gods only by your orders. Even though you are an ascetic, all the treasures of the earth are at your command. What surprises me then is that one like you should wish to steal my master's arrow!

The scriptures say that one should conduct oneself with honour. But if one like you can go astray, what can be expected of ordinary people like us? But I must say that your arrow too is somewhat like my master's, and it is possible you have made a mistake thinking it is your own. But now that I have made the position clear, you should not try to take something that does not belong to you.

There is another thing I must point out—Are you not ashamed to shoot at an animal that someone else has already killed? Honourable people do not try to take credit for another's work. If my master had not despatched this fierce animal to hell, one can well imagine what your condition would have been by this time. It is really odd that you chose to insult one who had done you this great favour.

My master does not care for this golden arrow. He has several more like it. But if you are keen to have it, you can ask him for it. He is generous and I am sure he will forgive you, for you do not seem to know the elementary rules of hunting.

You are a royal prince and have attained the status of a *rishi* through your austerities. Why throw away all this through such a mean deed? But what is the use of these arguments? You are a gentleman yourself and can well

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understand that no one will put up with such behaviour for long. And do not pride yourself thinking that you are a great warrior and that my master is just an ordinary hunter. He is an expert in the science of war, and more than a match for you. He is very near this place, with his warriors. O ascetic, my sincere advice to you would be that you meet him and seek his friendship. He will be pleased to have one like you for a friend, and you will be the gainer thereby."

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13. THE DREADFUL ASCETIC

Arjuna was provoked to anger when the forester unjustly accused him. But, keeping his cool, he said politely: "You have indeed conveyed your master's message in very clear terms. Although you are a forest dweller, the beauty of your language would entitle you to a place among the best families.

Intelligent as you seem to be, don't you think it was your duty to advise your master properly? By the grace of God I have enough arrows of my own, and I do not desire the arrows of even the gods themselves. Why should I then go roaming about the mountainside looking for the arrow of some ordinary hunter?

You say that I had no right to shoot at this boar as he had already been killed by your master. But how can you say that? The boar was certainly not the exclusive property of your master. The animals in the forest do not belong to anyone, and everyone has a right to them. This boar was coming to attack me, so I have killed it for my own protection.

And how can you be so sure that you master's arrow struck him first? In fact both the arrows struck him at the same moment. And I would also like to know—Who asked your master to be so kind as to protect me in the first place? Couldn't he see that I was fully armed and required none of his help?

Ah well, even granting that he shot the boar from generous motives, why should he now stoop so low as to accuse me of stealing his arrow? And it is most improper on your part too to suggest that I should beg of him for

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an arrow. If he needs arrows, a bow and a sword, let him come and ask for them and I shall gladly oblige. Or if he has the courage, let him fight for them.

You have the cheek to suggest that I should seek your master's friendship! What friendship can there be between a *Kshatriya* of royal blood and a killer of animals? Can a tiger befriend a jackal? Your master has insulted me in making such an improper suggestion. But still I forgive him.There is no glory in fighting the low-down ones, and no use befriending them either. So far I have tolerated the insults of this slayer of deer. But if he tries any further to dispute the arrow, he will find himself in the same state as one who tries to snatch the jewel from the serpent's head.* Now go back to your master and tell him to come forward if he dares!"

The Kirata returned to his master and told him the whole story. Siva had already heard everything and stood with a little smile on his lips. He now ordered his army into the attack. The warriors were eager to be the first to have a go at Arjuna, and as they rushed forward many trees were uprooted and creepers trampled into the ground.

When they came out of the forest into the open they saw Arjuna, thinned down because of his austerities but standing firm and fearless with his Gandiva bow, as though ready to destroy the world. He held just a single arrow in his hand, as though it were a friend, and remained unmoved even when he saw the hordes rushing against him. The soldiers were wonderstruck at the sight of the broad-shouldered ascetic who stood like a rock.

Suddenly afraid, for a moment the warriors checked themselves. Then, finding courage in numbers, they rushed foward and launched a combined attack against

*See glossary

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Arjuna. Their arrows looked like birds of prey flying straight to their quarry.

When he heard the familiar twang of bowstrings and saw the arrows, Arjuna felt very happy. His form swelled with joy so that his breastplate, which had become loose on him through six months of fasting, again fitted him snugly.

He then pulled the string of his faithful Gandiva to the ear and a stream of deadly arrows flew from his bow. These cut down the enemies' arrows while they were still in flight. So swift was he that the warriors saw nothing but a blur of movement followed by a shower of arrows coming straight for them. In their terror they saw Arjuna everywhere—before them and behind them, on one side and on the other.

The soldiers were amazed. All their attacks were blunted. In their confusion it seemed to them that their own arrows were turning back in the air and attacking them. Soon the army was scattered as by a fierce storm and the soldiers fled behind trees and rocks to save themselves from the dreadful ascetic who seemed bent on destroying the world.

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14. TWO GIANTS

Siva's warriors were fleeing from battle in wild panic. Their leaders called out after them, trying to check their headlong flight. "Come back, come back, brave warriors!" they shouted. "Why are you running away? You have conquered the demons several times in battle, and even the gods are no match for you. And then this man is neither god nor demon but just an ordinary human, greedy for the pleasures of the earth. He is all alone and has neither elephants nor chariots, not even a horse with him. Why should you then be afraid of him? These dreadful swords are glinting in the sun as though laughing at you. Where is your pride? Don't disgrace yourselves like this, or you will have no face to show to the world. Come back and fight. Yours will be the victory!" Losing a little of their fear, the Kiratas gradually came out of hiding and gathered round their master Siva. He told them to stand by while he himself went forward to tackle the ascetic.

Lord Siva was happy at Arjuna's success so far. But Arjuna's troubles were far from over, and the next chapter of his test was soon to begin.

Lord Siva came out of the forest and stood facing Arjuna, his own Pinaka bow in hand. Seeing the majestic form of the Kirata chief, Arjuna took firm hold on his Gandiva, whose string was made of twisted monkey-gut. After throwing a challenge at one another, they began to fight. The fight was watched eagerly not only by Siva's followers, but by the gods themselves who stood in heaven to witness this unique contest between two giants of the battlefield.

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Siva launched a fierce attack against Arjuna. His arrows, with fearsome sharp heads, were feathered with peacock feathers at their butt ends to keep them true and straight in their flight. As Siva wielded his Pinaka bow, the string resounded like thunder and the arrows were like shafts of lightning making straight for Arjuna.

But Arjuna, courageous as a lion, fought back with wonderful skill. Like meteors streaking in the evening sky, arrows flew from his Gandiva, meeting the arrows of the enemy in mid-air. The arrows clashed with the sound of a thunderclap, and flames shot out on account of the fierce friction produced.

Siva now increased the tempo of the fight. But Arjuna was quite equal to it and fought back with skill and courage, not allowing the enemy any advantage. His fighting blood was on fire, and sparks flew from his eyes.

Having taken a measure of Arjuna's strength, Siva now took aim and shot with great force an arrow that could wound but not kill. Arjuna discharged a stream of arrows to divert the course of this arrow but it kept coming straight at him, but it kept smashing his own arrows in its path. It was only with the greatest of difficulty that Arjuna was able to destroy the arrow before it got him.

Arjuna was amazed at the skill of the Kirata chief. "This warrior's name is quite unknown," he thought. "He appears to be just an ordinary hunter, but I have not been able to find a single weak point in his defences. Never did I dream that there could be such a one on earth, and all my strength is powerless against him. Even the great Bhishma and *guru* Drona are no match for him.

Is this all an illusion, or have I changed or my bow become slack? He is certainly not what his appearance would suggest. Is he a god or a demon? Whatever he may be, it is necessary to defeat this peerless warrior. A disease and an enemy must be destroyed at the earliest before they have time to gain strength."

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15. AT WAR WITH THE LORD

Arjuna's initial defeat only served to strengthen his resolve, and he was fully determined to defeat the enemy who stood before him. His months of hardship and austerity had toughened his fibre and developed an unbending will in him. So now, even after the setback he had received, he was ready and eager to continue the battle.

Ordinary weapons seemed quite ineffective against the powerful enemy, so Arjuna now decided to use more potent weapons. First he discharged the Weapon of Darkness into the air. No sooner done than a dense black cloud as of smoke descended from the sky on to the Kirata warriors. There was darkness everywhere. The warriors were overcome with weariness and, leaning against the trees, dropped off to sleep where they stood.

But Siva was completely unaffected by this. He now opened the terrible third eye in the middle of his forehead. A brilliant white flame shot out, and Arjuna was forced to shield his eyes against the blinding light. Just as the Light of Truth dispels all ignorance, so also the light from Siva's third eye dispelled the dense darkness. The warriors woke up, rubbing sleep from their eyes, and took firm hold of their weapons again.

Even though his weapon was rendered futile, Arjuna did not lose heart. He had a serpent weapon that discharged countless serpents which entwined themselves about the enemies' throats and choked life out of them. This weapon he now employed against the enemy.

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Immediately a stream of serpents went streaking in the air towards their prey. Their forked tongues darted in and out stabbing the air, and their hoods were tensed in readiness to strike. The serpents were like flashes of lightning in the sky, and they breathed out volumes of black smoke that dimmed even the light of the sun. In this murky gloom the eyes of the serpents shone like specks of molten gold.

The Kiratas cowered to the ground before this terrible threat, but Siva with a smile on his lips discharged his Eagle weapon. Immediately waves of eagles went swooping through the air, and seemed to swallow up the very sky in their path. When the serpents saw their dreaded enemy coming for them, they turned in the air, desperately trying to escape. But the eagles pursued them relentlessly and, catching up with them, cut them to pieces in the air. And so this threat was over too.

Arjuna was struck with amazement. Was there no limit to this man's skill and strength? Never did he imagine that such a one could exist. Still, he had one last weapon that could not be so easily dismissed. And so, taking up the dreaded Fire weapon, the most powerful of all weapons that existed on earth, he discharged it at the enemy. Immediately a huge whirling sphere of fire was formed that made straight for the enemy ranks like a charging tiger. Its fierce light seemed to blind even the sun, and its awful roar struck terror into the stoutest hearts.

It consumed everything in its path—trees burst into flame and rocks exploded with a loud noise. Assuming different forms, at one place it was like a heap of gold while at another it was like a Palash tree in full bloom. The flames shot up to the sky, so that even the black clouds were dried up and became white as pearls. The fire was advancing rapidly towards the enemy, threatening to engulf them in its terrible embrace.

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Siva now discharged the Water-weapon. Mountainous clouds formed in the sky and, accompanied by lightning and thunder, a blinding torrent of rain came down on earth. When the rain first fell on the fire a loud sizzling sound was produced like that of hot iron being immersed in water. Clouds of steam formed and rose in the sky, and small rainbows appeared all over where the fire had been earlier.

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16. THE BATTLE GOES ON

Seeing his unfailing weapons, which were like old friends, rendered futile, Arjuna's eyes burned and tears of rage and frustration fell from them. On account of his great exertions his hair was all in disarray and his face bathed in sweat. But even so, he did not give way to despair. Instead he took his faithful Gandiva in hand and got ready once again to face the enemy.

Arjuna lifted his great bow and shot streams of arrows at the enemy. Siva's warriors were unable to withstand the attack and soon fled the scene. But Arjuna was amazed to see that his arrows had as little effect on the Kirata chief as storm-driven raindrops against a granite cliff. Siva took the attack of Arjuna's arrows with a smile, just as the Himalayas patiently bear the attack of an elephant's tusks. The Lord felt unhappy that the brave Arjuna had to be defeated, but he was satisfied that his strength would thereby increase and he would be able to bear more easily the burden of the coming war with the Kauravas. A man's strength increases if he faces up to a superior enemy with courage and skill.

Siva now showed his terrible power. He shot arrows like lightning and the thunder of his bowstring seemed to assail Arjuna from all sides. Soon Arjuna's attack was blunted.

When he saw that his arrows were having no effect on the hunter, Arjuna began to lose heart. With the courage born of despair he increased the speed of his arrows still further. Siva deliberately avoided injuring Arjuna in any vital spot. But Arjuna's strength was steadily increasing and Siva was finding it a little difficult to cope

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Arjuna Flinging a Tree at the Kiratarjuniya Chief

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with him. He then decided that the time was come to defeat Arjuna, and through his divine powers emptied Arjuna's quivers of all the arrows.

Just as an elephant, by force of habit, keeps feeling with his trunk for water in a dried-up hole in a rock, Arjuna's hand went repeatedly to his empty quivers. Even though he realised that they were empty, his hand continued to grope vainly inside the quivers.

Soon Siva's arrows shattered Arjuna's breastplate. His state was now like that of a king who has been placed outside his fortress, without the protection of his army. Siva continued his stream of arrows at Arjuna's body, but in the heat of battle Arjuna did not even feel these. His courage itself became like an armour of steel for him.

Blood was flowing from his wounds, and Arjuna now had only an empty bow with him. But even then the *Kshatriya* did not yield. Leaping like a wounded tiger, he struck Siva a mighty blow with the Gandiva, but Siva wrenched it away from his hands.

His arrows were gone, even his bow was gone. Arjuna then took his sword, his last support, in his hand. Whirling it swiftly he cut down the stream of arrows coming towards him and leapt on Siva to strike. But Siva shot a powerful arrow that shattered the blade at the hilt. The shimmering blade fell to earth like a bolt of lightning.

Arjuna's weapons were all gone, and he now had only his hands to fight with. He began a fierce attack with stones, but the Kirata chief reduced these to dust with his arrows.

Arjuna uprooted trees and flung them against Siva, but he cut these to splinters with his arrows and they fell harmlessly to the ground. The battlefield looked like a place of worship, with flowers from the broken trees strewn all over.

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Then, ignoring the stream of arrows, Arjuna rushed at Siva and gave him a mighty blow on the chest with his fists. Siva took this with a smile just as a father takes the tantrums of a beloved child. The Lord was in ecstasy that his devotee had at last reached him.

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17. THE TEST IS OVER

Now of all his weapons, only his powerful arms remained and with these Arjuna attacked Siva like an angry elephant. Siva too set aside his bow and quivers, and hit back with fists that seemed to be made of iron. The sound of their blows echoed back from the caves in the mountains around them.

Arjuna was badly battered by Siva's blows and his chest was red with blood. But he accepted this severe punishment too as yet another part of his penance. He felt, however, that his own blows against the Kirata chief were futile as the angry waves of the ocean dashing themselves against a rock. Siva then gave Arjuna such a blow that his eyes swam and he reeled like a drunken man.

Arjuna's wrath was now inflamed beyond measure. Just for a moment he shook his head to clear his senses, then leapt upon Siva and pinned his arms to his sides in a tight grapple. A wrestling bout now began between the two. Both were experts at wrestling and took pride in the strength of their arms. Their moves were so swift that the warriors who stood around found it impossible to tell which of the two was the ascetic and which was Siva. The battle was fought with such fury that when they leapt at one another the ground sank under their feet and under the pressure springs of water spouted from the mountainside.

When the fearsome fight was at its height Siva leapt into the air to test the reaction of his devotee.

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Immediately Arjuna jumped after him and caught the two feet of the Lord.

The test was over. Arjuna's intention was to catch the Kirata by the feet and dash him to the ground, but the moment he touched Siva's feet, the Lord accepted him as his dear devotee. He took Arjuna into his arms and clasped him to his heart. The Lord was even more pleased at Arjuna's bravery than he had been with his devotion and austerities.

Pandu's son was amazed to see that the one he had taken to be a Kirata hunter was none other than the adored of the gods, Lord Siva himself. His manly form was smeared with ashes, his forehead was decorated with the new moon and his matted hair was tied into a knot with serpents. He wore a garment of elephant hide that was tied at the waist with a fierce serpent.

Arjuna bowed low to his deity in humble salutation. He saw with surprise that his quivers were filled with arrows, his Gandiva bow, his protective armour and sword – all this equipment was placed neatly near him.

At this moment a light refreshing drizzle came down from the sky and all ten directions were filled with auspicious sounds of music. Indra and the other gods came down from heaven in their *vimanas*. These *vimanas* were studded with gems that twinkled like stars and were drawn by large swans that flew in the sky with necklaces of gems round their necks. The gods alighted from their *vimanas* and held a canopy of flowers over Siva's head.

Tears of love and devotion in his eyes, Arjuna then worshipped Lord Siva and prayed to him: "O Lord of all Creation, forgive me for what I did in my ignorance. You are all-knowing while I am just an ignorant child.

Lord, the enemy has committed a great crime against the virtuous Yushishthira. I wish to defeat this enemy. O Lord, grant me the strength that I may attain success in my efforts."

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Lord Siva assured Arjuna of victory and gave him the terrible Rudra weapon of destruction. He also coached him in the science and art of archery, so that Arjuna would be unmatched in this form of warfare. Indra and the other gods then came forward and, after going thrice round Siva with reverence, went up to Arjuna. With Siva's permission they gave Arjuna their irresistible divine weapons and blessed him so that he should be victorious.

Thus the brave Arjuna's efforts were crowned with success. He bowed low at the feet of Siva. The Lord blessed him saying, "Go and be victorious over your enemies." Arjuna then returned the way he had come. In due course, arriving back in the forest where his brothers and Draupadi were anxiously waiting for him, he prostrated himself at the feet of his eldest brother Yudhishthira.

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The story of 'Kiratarjunya' ends here. But one last chapter has been added to this book to give the reader an idea of the further events leading up to the battle of Mahabharata and its outcome.

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18. WHERE DID IT LEAD

After their twelve years of exile and thirteenth year in disguise were over, the Pandavas requested their cousin Sri Krishna to go to Hastinapur on their behalf and ask Duryodhana to return their kingdom. Krishna did accordingly, but the arrogant Duryodhana refused even to listen to him. After exploring without success all avenues of peace, Krishna returned to the Pandavas. War had now become a certainty.

Various kings joined one side or the other in the great war of Mahabharata which was fought at Kurukshetra in northern India. During the battle which lasted eighteen days, Arjuna killed Bhishma, Karna and other great warriors. And Bhima too fulfilled the terrible oath he had taken some fourteen years earlier. He wiped out the Kaurava brothers and in the end killed Duryodhana and Dushasana too.

The Kauravas were completely annihilated along with their supporters. The Pandavas too suffered heavily but were victorious in the end. Accompanied by their wife Draupadi they returned to Hastinapur where Yushishthira was, at long last, crowned king.

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About the Author

Of the Sanskrit poets of the past two thousand years, *Mahakavi* (the Great Poet) Bharavi's name is held in very high esteem, and is even compared with that of the great Kalidas. Of all of Bharavi's works, only Kiratarjunya has been found. But there are several references in Sanskrit literature about Bharavi's works from which it is surmised that he wrote other works too.

As with many other Sanskrit writers, Bharavi has left no clues about the time and place of his birth. He probably lived some time before the 6th century A.D. And he appears to have travelled in the central and southern parts of India, as his work shows familiarity with these areas of the country.

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Glossary and Notes

Aeravata cast off the flower garland with which it was decorated

: Sage Durvasa was at one time journeying around the earth when he saw a heavenly garland in the hand of a Vidyadhari woman, one of the celestial beings that dwell in the sky. Captivated by the beauty and fragrance of the flowers, the sage asked the Vidyadhari for it. At his demand the large-eyed Vidyadhari woman gave him the garland, prostrating herself respectfully before him. Durvasa then put the garland round his own neck.

Durvasa saw Lord Indra coming, seated on his mighty elephant *Aeravata*, and accompanied by other lesser gods. Taking from his own neck the garland full of frenzied bees, he threw it at Indra the King of the gods. Indra caught it and put it round the neck of *Aeravata* where it shone like the river Ganges on Mount Kailash. *Aeravata* smelt the garland and threw it upon the ground. Furious at the insult, Durvasa said, "Drunk with power, O Indra, you have become too arrogant. You have not prostrated yourself before me, and you have rejected the garland that I have given you.

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Because you have insulted me, you will lose all your prosperity and good fortune."

Speedily alighting from the elephant's back, Indra prostrated himself before the sage and tried to pacify him. But Sage Durvasa spoke, "I am not a man with a compassionate heart, nor is forgiveness a part of my nature as it is of some other seers. Know that I am Durvasa. I shall not forgive you, however much you try to appease me!" Speaking thus, the *Brahman* left, and the King of gods mounted *Aeravata* once again and went to his capital Amravati in heaven.

From then on fortune deserted the three worlds. Plants and herbs withered and the earth became barren. With the three worlds steeped in misfortune, the gods became utterly spiritless. Taking this opportunity, the *Daityas*, demons of the underworld, declared war on the gods and defeated them. The gods went for refuge to Lord Vishnu, who was reclining on the coils of the serpent Sheshnag in the Ocean of Milk (in the sky), and related their problem to him.

"I shall tell you how to obtain the nectar that will strengthen your powers and enable you to defeat the *Daityas*," Lord Vishnu assured them. "Throw all the herbs into the Ocean of Milk. Then

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using Mount Mandara as a stirring stick and Vasuki the King of serpents as the twirling rope, you along with the *Daityas* must churn the ocean to obtain the nectar. I shall arrange that only you gods get the nectar to drink."

So directed by Vishnu, the gods made a pact with the demons to churn the Ocean of Milk. Out of the middle of the Ocean that was being churned by gods and demons, there first arose Surabhi, the divine cow. Next from the whirling milk ocean came the Parijata tree, perfuming the world with its fragrance. And then a most marvellous throng of *apsaras* sprang from the milky ocean. Next appeared the cool-rayed moon which Siva took as an ornament for his head. Still the gods and demons churned, and there arose from the sea the most wonderful jewel that has ever been seen. Lord Vishnu took this jewel, known as Kaustubha, and tied it round his neck. The gods and demons continued churning until there arose from the waters a terrible poisonous vapour, which threatened to destroy the three worlds. Lord Siva drank the poison and it burned his throat a deep blue. On this account Siva is called Neel-Kantha,or the One-with-the-blue-throat. And finally, after further churning, the celestial physician Dhanavantri rose with a bowl of nectar in his hands.

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The gods and demons all tried to grab the bowl, but just then Vishnu, taking the form of a beautiful woman, appeared before them and took the bowl. The demons were enraptured by her beauty and did not notice that she had given all the nectar to the gods to drink. Made invincible by the nectar, the gods attacked the demons and put them to flight and fortune again returned to the three worlds.

apsaras : Beautiful and graceful fairy-like girls in heaven. Sometimes a human being practised such severe austerities that he threatened to become greater than the gods. When this happened, the gods sent down *apsaras* to distract him and thus destroy the powers that he had developed through his austerities. (for origin of *apsaras*, see under *Aeravata...*)

Aryaputra : Literally, son of an Arya. this term was an affectionate form of address, used by a wife for her husband.

ashrama : hermitage, or a place where ascetics live.

Brahma, Vishnu Mahesh (Siva) : These are the three aspects of the one God, like three strands of fibre intertwined into a single rope. These three aspects of God are said to be responsible for the Creation, Sustenance and Destruction of the Universe respectively. But these functions are not watertight. For example, Siva is sometimes referred to as the Origin of the Universe.

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Brahman	:	The priestly class among the four castes of Hindu society.
Brahmchari	:	One who practices Brahmcharya. Brahmcharya was the student stage in a man's life, extending till the twenty-fifth year. During this period he was expected to remain unmarried and devote himself to studies and self-discipline under a teacher.
Brihaspati	:	the learned priest and teacher of the gods.
darshan	:	seeing someone worthy of reverence.
dharma	:	righteousness; also the god of dharma.
Gandharva	:	A class of semi-divine beings who are the musicians of the gods. They are the companions of the *apsaras*.
ghee	:	clarified butter.
guru	:	teacher
jewel from the serpent's head	:	In olden days snake-kings were said to carry a *mani* or jewel on their heads.
Kirata	:	An ancient tribe that dwelt among forests and in the mountains.
Kshatriya	:	The warrior class among the four castes of Hindu society.
maharshi	:	great *rishi* or great sage.
maharaj	:	literally 'great king'. A term of respect.
mantra	:	A line from a sacred Vedic text, having the power to act as a spell.
mridang	:	a kind of drum
muni	:	*rishi*, or sage
Panduputra	:	Son of Pandu.
Parasurama	:	Long ago, when the *Kshatriyas* were getting too proud and arrogant on account of their strength, Lord Vishnu took form as a human to teach them a lesson. He

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took form as Parasurama, son of the *Brahman* sage Jamadagni, and grew up to be a great warrior. One day, when Parasurama had gone into the forest, some *Kshatriya* princes went to Jamadagni's *ashrama* and killed him. When Parasurama returned to the *ashrama* and saw what had happened, he took a vow that he would wipe out the *Kshatriya* race from the face of the earth to avenge the killing of his father. Adopting as his weapons the battle-axe *(Parasu)* and the bow, the mighty warrior waged war on the *Kshatriyas* twenty-one times till the lakes were filled with blood and the rivers ran red.

rishi : *muni*, or sage.

sanyasi : a monk who has renounced the world.

swayamvara : literally 'selecting a bridegroom of one's choice'. In olden days, among royal families in India, a girl often chose her own husband from the invited guests. The ceremony held for this purpose was called the *swayamvara*.

the three worlds : the earth, the heavens above and the nether worlds below.

Veena : a stringed musical instrument.

viman : carriages that flew in the sky.

yagya : A religious sacrifice in which *ghee*, sweets and fragrant dried herbs etc are offered to a fire.

yoga : An ancient Hindu system of physical and mental self-control, the ultimate aim of which is to unite the practitioner with the Supreme Being. The practice of *yoga* is said to give certain powers to the practitioner.

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Vocabulary and Exercises

CHAPTER 1–KIRATARJUNYA–A PART OF MAHABHARATA

VOCABULARY

encounter	:	a hostile meeting between two persons or groups
illustrious	:	highly distinguished
devotion	:	deep affection
casket	:	small box for keeping precious things
pyre	:	pile of wood for burning a dead body
butt-end	:	the handle end of a weapon
mace	:	a heavy club with round metal head
induced	:	persuaded
boon	:	favour or blessing
thriving	:	prosperous
appealingly	:	looking for help or sympathy
to soothe	:	to calm
calamity	:	disaster

COMPREHENSION

1. The story of 'Kiratarjunya' is part of a well-known epic. Name this epic.
2. Who were Dhritarashtra and Pandu?
3. Why did Pandu succeed to the throne first?
4. What was his great sorrow?
5. Name the parents of Karna.
6. Who brought up Karna?
7. Name the other sons of Kunti and Madri.
8. What were they called?
9. How many sons did Dhritarashtra have? What were they called?

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10. Who was Bhishma?
11. Why did he come to be called '*Pitamah*'?
12. Who was Drona?
13. How did the princes meet him?
14. What did the princes learn from Dronacharya?
15. What kind of relations did the Kauravas and Pandavas have with each other?
16. How did the Pandavas bring home Draupadi?
17. Name the capital city of the Pandavas.
18. What was the plot hatched by Duryodhana and Sakuni against the Pandavas?
19. In what shape did Draupadi receive divine aid?
20. Why was Bhima so angry?
21. Why did the Pandavas go back for a second game of dice?
22. What was the result?
23. What condition had Duryodhana laid down for the loser?

COMPOSITION

Write briefly the story of the shellac palace which was prepared for the Pandavas.

LANGUAGE STUDY

Fill in the blanks with suitable prepositions:

1. In order..... enjoy this story, it is necessary ..... understand the Mahabharata.
2. Pandu was cursed..... a sage.
3. Sage Durvasa was pleased.....Kunti.
4. Madri begged.....Kunti.....stay alive and look after her children.
5. He took a bow and arrows.....one of the princes.
6. Many kings and princes went.....try....the hand of Draupadi.
7. Drona was asked to take.....the military training.....the princes.
8. The princes learnt the art.....warfare.....his guidance.

Chapter 2—IN THE FOREST

VOCABULARY

vow : solemn promise
assured : gave him confidence about something

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diplomacy	:	skill in dealing with people
vices	:	immoral habits
left no stone unturned	:	did everything possible
lavishly	:	generously
recipient	:	one who receives something
dispenses	:	deals out
forged	:	here means formed
bountiful	:	abundant, plentiful
vigilance	:	watchfulness
bent upon	:	determined to

COMPREHENSION

1. How were the Pandavas deprived of their kingdom and wealth a second time?
2. Why did they leave for the forest?
3. What made the Pandavas uneasy even in the forest?
4. For what purpose did Yudhishthira send a man to Hastinapur?
5. Why was Duryodhana worried even though he had got the throne of Hastinapur?
6. Why had Duryodhana become so polite and generous?
7. Name two other steps that Duryodhana had taken to make sure he would not lose the throne.

COMPOSITION

Write a paragraph describing the Pandavas' departure from Hastinapur and their life in the forest.

LANGUAGE STUDY

Explain in your own words:

1. A spy is the eyes and ears of a king.
2. Nothing could be farther from the truth.
3. He makes no distinction between rich and poor.
4. He does not relax his vigilance one bit.

Chapter 3—DRAUPADI SPEAKS HER-MIND

VOCABULARY

suffused with colour	:	flooded with colour, or became red

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humiliation	:	deeply hurt pride
frustration	:	deep disappointment
conventions	:	accepted ways of behaviour
gleam	:	glint of light
pulling himself together	:	taking control over himself
heritage	:	traditions passed down in family
treachery	:	deception
guile	:	cunning, deceit
at your disposal	:	available to you
righteous	:	something that is morally right
valiant	:	brave
valour	:	bravery
splendour	:	brightness, grandeur

COMPREHENSION

1. Why was Draupadi so angry when she heard of the enemy's doings?
2. In what way were Yudhishthira's brothers suffering in the forest?
3. Draupadi said, "When I think of all the trouble that has been heaped upon you, my heart bleeds with sorrow." What trouble did she mean?
4. What was it that Draupadi begged Yudhishthira to do?
5. Why did Draupadi suggest that Yudhishthira should throw away his bow?
6. Draupadi felt that Yudhishthira was no longer bound by his promise of exile for thirteen years. Why did she feel that way?

COMPOSITION

In a short paragraph explain what Draupadi means by saying, "No sooner did the kingdom come to you than you gave it away to the enemy with your own hands."

LANGUAGE STUDY

Use the following phrases in sentences of your own:

pride yourself on, dead silence, a great heritage, a tight situation, striking back.

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Chapter 4—THE VIEWS OF BHIMA

VOCABULARY

mounted	:	here means increased
shies away	:	turns away
lethargy	:	dullness, inaction
kindle	:	light up
quenched	:	cooled
venture	:	a risky undertaking
launched	:	started
haughty	:	rude, arrogant
biding their time	:	waiting for an opportunity
carnivorous	:	flesh-eating

COMPREHENSION

1. Why was Bhima so angry with Duryodhana?
2. Bhima sounds angry with Yudhishthira too. Why?
3. What arguments does Bhima give in favour of attacking the enemy right away and not waiting till the years of exile are over?
4. Why does Yudhishthira want to wait before launching an attack on the enemy?
5. What vows is Yudhishthira referring to and why is he unwilling to break them?

COMPOSITION

This chapter shows us certain qualities in the characters of Duryodhana, Bhima and Yudhishthira. What are these qualities? Write them down briefly.

LANGUAGE STUDY

Re-write the last paragraph in the present tense. Begin "While Yudhishthira is trying to reason in this manner.....

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Chapter 5—ADVICE FROM A SAGE

VOCABULARY

stature	:	height

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aura	:	atmosphere surrounding a person
adoration	:	great love and devotion
auspicious	:	something that indicates the coming of good luck
austerities	:	hardships practised for religious reasons
avenge	:	take revenge
prostrating	:	lying face down on ground
chant	:	recite
ascetic	:	one who follows a simple and strict way of life
invincible	:	unconquerable

COMPREHENSION

1. How do we know that Vyas Muni was very highly respected?
2. Why did Vyas Muni feel drawn towards Yudhishthira?
3. What did Vyas Muni think of the way the Kauravas and Pandavas had behaved in the past?
4. What advice did he give to Yudhishthira?
5. What was the real purpose of Vyas Muni's visit?
6. Where did he ask Arjuna to go?
7. What was Arjuna expected to do once he had reached there?
8. Who was to guide him?

COMPOSITION

"Just look at the enemy's strength," said Vyas Muni. Give the names and a brief description of the warriors who made the Kaurava army so strong.

LANGUAGE STUDY

Re-write in indirect speech:

Yudhishthira said, "You are worthy of adoration by all mankind." Vyas Muni told Yudhishthira, "You must take steps to increase your own strength." He told Yudhishthira, "Do not let any enemy get the better of you."

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Chapter 6—A FAREWELL

VOCABULARY

mission	:	special task

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tributes	:	money or wealth given by the conquered to the conquerer
tresses	:	long hair on the head
violated	:	treated cruelly or with violence
frantic	:	greatly disturbed
vigilance	:	watchfulness
undertaking	:	task
quivers	:	vertical containers for carrying arrows

COMPREHENSION

1. Why was Draupadi so troubled at the departure of Arjuna?
2. How did she spur Arjuna on to action?
3. What effect did her words have on Arjuna?
4. Why had Arjuna's enemies never seen his quivers?

COMPOSITION

From this chapter gather evidence in support of the following statements:

1. Arjuna was a great warrior.
2. He had great regard and affection for his family.
3. He had great respect for the family priest.

LANGUAGE STUDY

Fill in the blanks with suitable prepositions:

1. He has kept control.....himself.
2. The child's father was frantic.....worry.
3. She took leave.....him.
4. On account.....the heat, the spring had dried.

****

Chapter 7—THE JOURNEY

VOCABULARY

bedecked	:	adorned
lush	:	rich, plentiful

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speckled	:	dotted
meadow	:	fertile grassland
routed	:	put to flight
pounding	:	thumping, or hammering at
to crop	:	to bite off and eat grass or leaves
churning	:	agitating milk or curd to produce butter
glinting	:	flashing
symbol	:	sign or mark
to hover	:	to remain in the air at one place
enraptured	:	filled with great joy

COMPREHENSION

1. What made Arjuna's journey to the mountains so pleasant?
2. What did Arjuna see when he came to the foot of the mountains?
3. Relate, in your own words, the story of mountains with wings.
4. Why did Arjuna feel sad when Guhmak took his leave?

COMPREHENSION

"Nowhere in the three worlds is there a place that can compare with this," said the *Kirata*, speaking of the Himalayas. Write a paragraph to show why he said this.

LANGUAGE STUDY

Give the adjective forms of the following nouns:

mountain, speed, energy, difficulty, symbol, grandeur

****

Chapter 8—ARJUNA IN MEDITATION

VOCABULARY

meditation	:	deep thought
astonished	:	greatly surprised
penance	:	self-punishment
devotee	:	one who worships
lust	:	strong passion
nymphs	:	fairy-like girls
accomplished	:	skilled

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COMPREHENSION

1. What made Arjuna feel that nature itself was pleased at his mission?
2. How did Arjuna prepare himself for meditation?
3. What was the one desire in his heart?
4. Show how Arjuna's presence brought peace to his surroundings.
5. Where did the forest-dwellers go in a body?
6. What was the purpose of this visit?
7. Why did Indra's heart overflow with joy?
8. Why did he send for the *apsaras*?
9. How did Indra remove the fears of the *apsaras*?

COMPOSITION

Imagine you live in the forest where Arjuna is meditating. How would you tell Lord Indra about him?

LANGUAGE STUDY

Give the noun forms of the following adjectives:

brilliant, majestic, protective, supreme, fierce, peaceful, ignorant.

****

Chapter 9—AN ERRAND FOR THE APSARAS

VOCABULARY

vermilion	:	bright red-coloured powder
throng	:	crowd
alighted	:	got down
venture	:	risky task
ensnare	:	captivate by a trick
steadfast	:	firm and unchanging
slunk away	:	went away in a guilty manner
flitting	:	flying quickly
frenzy	:	here means excited movements
frustrated	:	here means made ineffective
taunts	:	insults
raved	:	spoke angrily
girdle	:	belt

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COMPREHENSION

1. How were the elephants decorated for the journey?
2. Who else joined the party?
3. Where did the 'gay throng' gather and where was it going?
4. What happened when they came close to the sun?
5. What happened when they passed through clouds?
6. How did the *apsaras* feel when they first looked at Arjuna?
7. What did they do first of all to divert Arjuna's attention?
8. Why did they call the God of Seasons to their aid?
9. Why did they hurl taunts at Arjuna?

COMPOSITION

Write a paragraph to show how the rainy season and autumn tried to charm Arjuna

LANGUAGE STUDY

Fill in the blanks with the correct form of the verb within brackets:

1. After.....their cosmetics, the *apsaras* set out for Arjuna's hermitage. (apply)
2. When autumn..... , the maidens called Spring to their aid. (fail)
3. The *apsaras* knew they.....their hearts to Arjuna. (lose)
4. In spite of temptation, Arjuna.....steadfast. (remain)
5. On and on they danced, the drums.....pace with the dancers. (keep)

****

Chapter 10—A VISITOR

VOCABULARY

dedication	:	devotion to a noble cause
venerable	:	deserving respect
partaken	:	eaten
renunciation	:	giving up of worldly desires
fickle	:	temporary, inconstant
immortality	:	everlasting life
liberation	:	release
salvation	:	saving from sin, disaster etc.
embodiment	:	having a physical form
illuminating	:	throwing light on or making something clear
exalted	:	lofty, of high rank

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hermit	:	one who lives alone in order to pursue a religious life undisturbed
outrage	:	cruel, violent act
kith and kin	:	friends and relatives
destitute	:	one who is extremely poor
fleeting	:	passing away quickly
resolved	:	determined
overwhelmed	:	overcome
invincible	:	unconquerable

COMPREHENSION

1. Why did Indra disguise himself?
2. In what way was the sage's appearance remarkable?
3. Narrate briefly what the sage told Arjuna.
4. Arjuna said that he had only one desire in his heart. What was this desire?
5. Why did Arjuna wish to please the thousand-eyed Indra?
6. What did Indra advise Arjuna to do in order to achieve complete success?

COMPOSITION

In the earlier chapters you have read that Draupadi and Bhima were not at all happy about the fact that Yudhishthira followed the path of *dharma* instead of punishing the enemy. How did Arjuna feel about it? Write down his views in one paragraph.

LANGUAGE STUDY

Change the following to indirect speech:

1. Arjuna said, "I have not come here to gain release from this fleeting life."
2. Indra told Arjuna, "Your appearance makes me think that you desire not immortality but the end of your enemies."
3. Indra said, "If you want complete success, then worship Siva."

Chapter 11—WORSHIP OF THE GREAT SIVA

VOCABULARY

luscious	:	delicious

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lustre	:	brightness
suspends	:	stops for some time
subdue	:	conquer
expression	:	the look on the face
come to grief	:	come to a sad end
hermitage	:	a place where a hermit lives

COMPREHENSION

1. How did Arjuna start his worship of Siva ?
2. Why did the ascetics living in the forest go to Siva ?
3. What, according to the ascetics, was the most amazing thing about Arjuna ?
4. How did Lord Siva re-assure the ascetics ?
5. What was the danger threatening Arjuna ?
6. What plan did Lord Siva make ?
7. Why did he ask the ascetics to accompany him ?

COMPOSITION

It is said of Arjuna that 'through self-discipline he had developed a tremendous will, firm as the Himalayas'. Quote a few passages in support of this statement.

LANGUAGE STUDY

Fill in the blanks with suitable articles:

1. Arjuna spent.....long time, meditating in.....Himalayas.
2. He wore clothes made of bark, like.....ascetic.
3. It seemed that he wished to destroy.....three worlds.
4. He was doing.....work of.....gods.
5. He was vigilant all.....time.
6. .....demon was planning.....attack on Arjuna.
7. He had taken.....form of.....wild boar.
8. Lord Siva planned to go disguised as.....*Kirata* chief.

* * * * *

Chapter 12—A KIRATA CHIEFTAIN

VOCABULARY

assortment	:	collection of different types of objects
dispersed	:	scattered

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clamour	:	noisy, confused outbreak of voices
menacing	:	threatening
stampede	:	a sudden rush on account of fear
bristles	:	short, stiff hair
impact	:	collision
prey	:	a hunted person or animal
cower	:	to shrink back in fear
fútile	:	fruitless
scriptures	:	sacred religious books
go astray	:	go on the wrong path

COMPREHENSION

1. How was Lord Siva dressed when he went to Arjuna's hermitage?
2. What was the boar-demon waiting for ?
3. What did the boar-demon look like ?
4. Why was Arjuna surprised when the boar rushed at him ?
5. How did the demon meet his end ?
6. Why did Arjuna go up to the dead boar ?
7. Why did the forester object to Arjuna taking the arrow ?
8. What else did the forester object to ?
9. What did he advise Arjuna to do ?

COMPOSITION

Describe briefly how Siva's followers proceeded through the forest.

LANGUAGE STUDY

Re-write in the present tense the paragraph starting 'Siva's arrow.....the mist'. Begin like this, 'Siva's arrow is....'

* * * * *

Chapter 13—THE DREADFUL ASCETIC

VOCABULARY

provoke	:	annoy
exclusive	:	here means reserved for someone
granting	:	admitting
motive	:	reason for doing something

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cheek	:	here means rudeness
slayer	:	killer
hordes	:	crowds
launched	:	started
quarry	:	a creature that is hunted
twang	:	sound made by a tight string being pulled and released

COMPREHENSION

1. Why did Arjuna become angry ?
2. How did Arjuna answer to the charges of the forester, namely
   a) that he had come to steal another's arrow.
   b) that he had no right to shoot at the boar.
3. Why did Arjuna turn down the offer of friendship with the *Kirata* chief ?
4. Why were Siva's followers eager to have a go at Arjuna ?
5. What did Arjuna look like as he faced the *Kirata* warriors, all ready for battle ?
6. What made Arjuna happy at this point of time ?
7. How did Arjuna prove his worth in battle ?
8. What was the result ?

COMPOSITION

Why do you think Siva smiled at the conversation between Arjuna and the Kirata warrior ? Write down your answers in a paragraph.

LANGUAGE STUDY

Write down the antonyms (opposites) of:
familiar, broad, straight, fierce, storm, forward, ordinary, first, generous, courage.

****

Chapter 14—TWO GIANTS

VOCABULARY

wielded	:	operated with the hands
resounded	:	echoed
thunderclap	:	sound of thunder
tempo	:	speed

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illusion	:	seeing something that does not really exist
slack	:	loose
peerless	:	without an equal

COMPREHENSION

1. How did the leaders of the warriors succeed in bringing them back ?
2. Why was Lord Siva happy ?
3. What was the next chapter in Arjuna's test ?
4. Who stood up to watch the fight between Siva and Arjuna ?
5. What were the Pinaka and Gandiva ?
6. Why were Siva's arrows feathered ?

COMPOSITION

Describe briefly Arjuna's reaction to the skill and power of the *Kirata* chief (Lord Siva).

LANGUAGE STUDY

Write each of the following pairs of sentences as one sentence:

1. Lord Siva was happy at Arjuna's success. Arjuna's troubles were far from over. (start 'Although.....')
2. They threw a challenge at one another. They began to fight. (start 'Having.....')
3. Siva put an arrow to his bow. The string resounded like thunder. (start 'When.....')

* * * * *

Chapter 15 – AT WAR WITH THE LORD

VOCABULARY

resolve	:	determination
toughened his fibre	:	made him physically and morally stronger
potent	:	powerful
to shield	:	to protect
dispels	:	drives away
rendered futile	:	made ineffective
entwined	:	twisted

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streaking	:	going fast
murky	:	dark
swooping	:	going with a rush
whirling	:	moving round and round quickly
sizzling	:	loud hissing sound

COMPREHENSION

1. What effect did his initial defeat have on Arjuna ?
2. Why did he decide to use potent weapons ?
3. What was the first weapon that he used ?
4. How did Siva meet it ?
5. What was Arjuna's next weapon ?
6. What did Siva release in reply ?
7. How did Arjuna feel when Siva got the better of his first two weapons ?

COMPOSITION

Show how the water-weapon wiped out the effects of the fire-weapon.

LANGUAGE STUDY

Use the following phrases in sentences of your own:

burst into flame, a charging tiger, struck terror into, in full bloom, toughened his fibre, an unbending will.

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Chapter 16 — THE BATTLE GOES ON

VOCABULARY

disarray	:	disorder
assail	:	attack violently
deliberately	:	intentionally
to cope with	:	to deal successfully with
shimmering	:	trembling, glinting light
hilt	:	handle of sword, dagger etc.
strewn	:	scattered
tantrum	:	fit of bad temper
ecstasy	:	feeling of great joy

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COMPREHENSION

1. Why was Arjuna angry and frustrated ?
2. How did his arrows affect Siva and his followers ?
3. Why was Arjuna's strength increasing all the time ?
4. When did Siva decide to defeat Arjuna ?
5. What was his first move in this direction ?
6. What weapons did Arjuna use against Siva thereafter ?

COMPOSITION

In this chapter Arjuna emerges as a man of rare courage and strength.
Write a paragraph in support of this statement.

LANGUAGE STUDY

Give the noun forms of the following adverbs:

patiently, repeatedly, unhappily, steadily, swiftly, vainly, harmlessly.

* * * * *

Chapter 17 — THE TEST IS OVER

VOCABULARY

reeled	:	staggered
grapple	:	seize in a strong hold
spouted	:	gushed forth in a jet
clasped	:	embraced
deity	:	God
canopy	:	a cloth roof held up on poles

COMPREHENSION

1. What was the last weapon left with Arjuna ?
2. What was the last part of the battle between Siva and Arjuna?
3. What brought the test to an end ?
4. How did Siva show that he had accepted Arjuna as a devotee ?
5. Who joined Siva and Arjuna at this point of time ?
6. What did Arjuna ask Siva to give him ?.
7. What was Siva's reply ?
8. How did Indra and the other gods bless Arjuna ?

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COMPOSITION

What was the main reason for the gods helping Arjuna? And what were the qualities that helped Arjuna attain success?

LANGUAGE STUDY

Re-write in the present tense the paragraph beginning 'Thus the brave Arjuna's efforts.....his eldest brother Yudhishthira'.

* * * * * * *

Chapter 18 — WHERE DID IT LEAD?

VOCABULARY

avenues	:	ways
annihilated	:	completely destroyed
oath	:	a solemn promise

COMPREHENSION

1. When did war between the Pandavas and Kauravas become a certainty ?
2. How long did the battle last ?
3. Name some of the warriors killed.
4. What was the result of the war ?

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